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Presented are various approaches said to be effective in educating economically and educationally disadvantaged students. The document offers general guidelines to teachers and emphasizes the value of a "structured classroom environment." Automatic promotion of economically disadvantaged students is said to be harmful. Also noted is the need for building self confidence in these students. Schools serving disadvantaged especially need administrators who can exercise high levels of professional leadership. (NH)

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Raising Standards in the Inner-City Schools

by

DANIEL U. LEVINE

Associate Director,
Center for the Study of Metropolitan
Problems in Education,
University of Missouri at Kansas City

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS
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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS PAPER

. . . many educationally disadvantaged students can be helped to achieve at a satisfactory level in school. Here and there one finds examples, several of them cited in the following pages, which demonstrate that disadvantaged students need not lag years behind their middle-class peers in achievement, that their schools need not be the ill-tempered, spiritually debilitating places so many are today. (page 6)

Most educators who work with disadvantaged youth are now agreed that the curriculum in the low-income school should be heavily oriented toward the development of language skills, even if an unusually heavy emphasis on language arts—particularly reading—necessitates a corresponding de-emphasis on other activities. (page 9)

We are approaching a time when foreclosure of the bankrupt policy of awarding automatic promotions to educationally disadvantaged youth will be both realistic and urgently necessary. (page 23)

. . . the teacher who expects little from her students helps to produce students of whom little can be expected. (page 24)

. . . the appropriate learning environment for educationally disadvantaged youth is one which is structured and consistent, but a principal cannot sit back and expect the hard-pressed members of the faculty of an inner-city school to somehow reach this conclusion automatically, particularly in view of the fact that their training as well as their personal inclinations may dispose many of them to believe that teachers should provide as little structure as possible. (page 29)

Printed December, 1966

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Introduction

"You people *might as well be out on the street for all the learning you've done in school this semester. Here I knock myself out trying to help* you people *learn, and what kind of reaction do I get from you? Nothing but six papers turned in out of thirty-four. Sometimes I wonder why I stay in this school at all. Don't you realize that you need an education to get a good job?* You people *just don't want to work hard enough to make something of yourselves.*"

—Teacher to class.

"*I've been teaching here for twelve years and it gets worse every year. At least I used to be able to teach, but now I spend most of my time trying to get* these kids *to pay attention and not knock each other's brains out. They are very slow, you know, and they just can't seem to catch on to most of the work we do. I wish there were some way we could reach* these people."

—Teacher to embarrassed visitor who tries to move out of hearing distance of a classroom in which students slump over desks or stare out of windows.

Despite all that has been done in the past two or three years to improve the level of education in low-income communities, an observer who visits schools in such areas is still very likely to encounter discouraged teachers and students playing out a mean-spirited relationship based on mutual dislike and distrust. The level of performance of low-income students generally continues to lag several years behind the level attained in schools in middle-class areas. Vast numbers continue to exclude themselves from a productive role in an advanced, industrial society by dropping out of school before completing the requirements for a high school diploma or by otherwise

NOTE: The author wishes to acknowledge gratefully the assistance of Russell C. Doll, whose suggestions and encouragement constituted a major contribution in the preparation of this paper.

failing to acquire the educational skills that could equip them for a rich and satisfying future. Millions remain trapped in an "underclass" which is a fertile breeding ground for riots and open insurrection.

Recent increases in the resources available for educating low-income youth have been both welcome and necessary, but to date they have barely enabled the schools to hold their own. Disadvantaged students in city after city continue to fall further behind grade level each year they are in school, and many of their exasperated teachers continue to react by fleeing to less troubled schools in more favored communities or by perceiving the schools in which they teach as custodial rather than educational institutions. Many relieve their frustrations by directing verbal assaults such as those quoted above at captive groups of bored if not rebellious students. Trapped in situations in which they see little meaning and experience less success, economically disadvantaged students become progressively more hostile as they move through the middle and upper grades. Some merely withdraw psychologically; others act out their school-compounded frustrations and make it all but impossible for their instructors to do any real teaching. As the hostile, disruptive youngster increasingly sets the tone of the school, teachers and administrators become still more pessimistic about their situation and are tempted to explain their problems in terms of negative stereotypes which blanket all their students under such headings as "you people" or "these people" who just don't "have what it takes" to succeed.

Increased federal and state support for low-income schools will not in itself make school experiences relevant for disadvantaged youth, nor will it automatically create better teacher-pupil relationships. The scholastic performance of disadvantaged students will not improve very much until the educational programs in low-income schools are thoroughly reorganized to take into account the particular learning handicaps which make it all but impossible for so many pupils to function satisfactorily in classes organized and conducted in accordance with conventional methods and materials.

Economic Deprivation: The Root of Educational Disadvantage

To be poor in our society usually means to be deprived of adequate experience with objects, words, concepts, and ideas to which it is assumed children have been exposed before they ever enter the

doors of the school. Even educators who recognize that life in a slum makes it difficult for a child to gain familiarity with commonplace terms and objects are constantly amazed at the limitations in the background of students such as those of a teacher who reported that ". . . in one of my classes I had a girl who asked whether we have a president or a king of the United States. We took a vote and 'a president' won by a small majority." Instruction in school is based on the assumption that teachers and students share a formal vocabulary, but the treacherous ease with which teachers can overlook the fact that low-income students may be unfamiliar with even the most elementary terms is illustrated in the following anecdote related by Walter G. Daniel, editor of *The Journal of Negro Education:*

> The teacher was trying to explain the process of 'carrying numbers' from one column to another. When the instructor's efforts continued to be unsuccessful, a student agreed to assist the classmate, who immediately grasped the idea and added the figures correctly. When the amazed teacher asked the pupil teacher what explanation had been given, the latter responded that he had simply told his fellow student 'to tote the number' rather than saying 'to carry' it from one column to the next.[1]

The educational handicaps generated in economically depressed circumstances, however, may be far more serious than simple lack of familiarity with the vocabulary and instructional materials encountered in the school. Some of these handicaps, such as lack of space to study in the home and the need to supplement the family income by working long hours which more fortunate youngsters devote to study, are direct and unmistakable. But a deprived background may also operate in a less obvious way to inhibit the development of cognitive and social skills which a child needs to possess if he is to succeed in the complicated tasks he is called on to perform in the school. The language patterns which low-income youth acquire at home are likely to be crude and non-elaborative, and in all too many cases their perceptual skills are not adequately exercised and developed through frequent contact with a variety of stimuli. The end result is that an appreciable percentage of low-income youth are slow to acquire the basic concepts and the verbal facility which play a key role in subsequent intellectual development by facilitating the perception of similarities and differences, channeling the development of intellectual generalizations, and mediating the increasingly abstract

[1] Walter G. Daniel, "Editorial Comment: New Focus on the American Student as a Learner," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Winter 1965, p. 2.

interchange between the child and his environment. The effects of an economically disadvantaged environment on the development of the higher mental skills are part of a complex process which received too little attention until very recently, but its basic dynamics have been rather clearly delineated in such passages as the following description by the psychologist J. McVicker Hunt:

> . . . crowded living conditions . . . hamper development. As an infant begins to move under his own power, to manipulate things, and to throw things, he is likely to get in the way of adults who are ill-tempered from their own discomforts and frustrations. . . . In such an atmosphere, a child's opportunity to carry out the activities required for his locomotor and manipulative development must almost inevitably be sharply curbed.
>
> Moreover, late in his second or early in his third year, after he has developed a number of pseudo-words and achieved the 'learning set' that 'things have names,' the child in a crowded, poverty-stricken family probably meets another obstacle: His questions too seldom bring suitable answers, and too often bring punishment that inhibits further questioning.[2]

Growing up in depressed and disorganized surroundings may affect a child's social development no less severely than it does his mental development. If the adults who minister to him do not have the time, inclination, or knowledge to establish a predictable pattern for satisfying his needs for food, affection, and protection from the confusion of the outside world, he is not likely to feel psychologically secure enough to moderate his need for physical gratification in situations which allow him to satisfy elemental impulses. If, as he grows older, his physical needs are irregularly and incompletely satisfied, he learns that the way to avoid feelings of dissatisfaction is to satiate himself in immediate gratification. His parents, who have not themselves enjoyed the rewards of an affluent society, may not understand how to help him prepare for the demands of the school; instead they may knowingly or unknowingly communicate values which cause him to be hostile or ambivalent about the values he encounters in the school. Intellectual persistence, emotional self-control, and the postponement of immediate gratification to achieve distant goals, after all, are virtues which, although sometimes derided as "middle-class," contribute to success in school, and it is precisely these qualities which are not developed very easily in the chaotic struggle for survival in the slum.

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[2] "How Children Develop Intellectually," *Children*, May-June, 1964.

It is not at all difficult to understand, then, why so many economically disadvantaged children are also educationally disadvantaged in the sense that deficiencies in their mental and social development make it all but impossible for them to succeed in "normal" classrooms in which conventional approaches are used to teach standard materials.[3] The hardships and deprivations of a low-income environment have affected the educationally disadvantaged child in such a way that he cannot function adequately or with any degree of autonomy in a conventional classroom situation. His performance in school is depressed by most, though not necessarily all, of the following limitations: impairment of cognitive and perceptual skills; poor impulse control; lack of interest in academic subject matter; lack of self-confidence in one's ability as a learner; unfamiliarity with common terms, objects, and concepts; inadequate understanding of rules and instructions; and insufficient retention of factual and ideational subject matter. As a result, his achievement is several years below grade level by the time he reaches the sixth or seventh grade.

The serious learning problems which characterize educationally disadvantaged youth have led many teachers and administrators to conclude that, with only occasional exceptions, little can be done to provide remedial or compensatory programs which would make a significant difference in improving the scholastic performance of so handicapped a population. Sometimes they point to solid evidence that an appreciable percentage of a child's growth, whether physical, mental, or social, is completed by the time he enters school. Rightfully they point out that maximal development of skills at a given stage of development depends on the prior acquisition of related skills which themselves are most easily and fully mastered at particular stages of maturational receptivity. It follows that by the time an educationally

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[3] The concept of the "educationally disadvantaged child" as used in this paper does not lend itself to precise measurement or "clean" distinctions. In concentrating on a child's inability to function successfully in a conventional classroom, it makes no distinction among great numbers of economcially disadvantaged youngsters, no two of whom have exactly the same combination of environmentally-induced learning handicaps. It suggests no exact cut-off point to distinguish the low-income child who is educationally disadvantaged from the child who is not severely handicapped in school. Nevertheless, distinguishing in practice between low-income youngsters who are and are not educationally disadvantaged does not appear to be a very serious problem, and teachers seem to do it with very little trouble. The urgent and more difficult problem is to identify and implement the significant changes that will have to be made in thousands of classrooms if educationally disadvantaged youth are to attain an acceptable level of performance in school.

disadvantaged child enters school he may have learning handicaps which cannot be *entirely* eliminated. Scholars are unsure, however, whether and to what degree developmental learning handicaps are reversible, and, in any case, the arguments of those who believe that permanent harm results from early deprivation do not justify the conclusion that little or nothing can be done to overcome a student's handicaps in the school.

One cannot at present pinpoint the exact degree to which the stultifying effects of an educationally disadvantaged background could be reversed if schools were organized and administered according to policies that embodied a concerted attack on the specific educational problems associated with disadvantaged status, but we do have an accumulating body of evidence which indicates that under the proper conditions, many educationally disadvantaged students can be helped to achieve at a satisfactory level in school. Here and there one finds examples, several of them cited in the following pages, which demonstrate that disadvantaged students need not lag years behind their middle-class peers in achievement, that their schools need not be the ill-tempered, spiritually debilitating places so many are today.

Educating the Economically and Educationally Disadvantaged Student

Our understanding of child growth in general, and of the genesis of educational disadvantage in particular, has been greatly enhanced by the recent work of scholars who have attempted to assess how human development is facilitated and impeded by various environmental conditions. Probably the most significant of these studies was reported by Benjamin Bloom in an influential book published in 1964 under the title *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics.* Professor Bloom's major conclusion, after marshalling the available research evidence on the mental, emotional, and social development of children, was that the school should intervene earlier and more vigorously to counteract the detrimental effects of disadvantaged environments.

Recently Bloom was asked to spell out more explicitly the practical implications suggested by his studies. In doing so, he pointed out that "longitudinal evidence makes it clear that human characteristics are strongly influenced by the environment with which the individual interacts." "Our studies," he added, make it "evident that highly consistent environments have more powerful effects on specific relevant

characteristics than environments which are not so consistent . . . a highly consistent school environment is likely to produce marked effects on the students . . . [whereas] a highly inconsistent environment is likely to have only a negligible effect on the students' development both in the cognitive as well as affective domain."[4]

If, as Bloom argues, it is generally true that consistent educational environments facilitate the attainment of complex learning skills, consistency in the educational environment is likely to be particularly indispensable in the development of educationally disadvantaged youth whose home environments are inconsistent with that of the school and who will remain far behind in their schoolwork unless they progress at a faster than normal rate. As noted in the preceding section, the previous experience of the educationally disadvantaged student simply has not prepared him to respond meaningfully to intellectual challenges involving a complicated sequence of abstract behaviors or to closely regulate his impulses and exercise self-direction in activities that embody little immediate interest or reward. Using somewhat different terminology to describe the educationally disadvantaged child, David E. Hunt has found that unusually large numbers of low-income students have "failed to incorporate generalized standards" with which to regulate their behavior in formal situations calling for adherence to abstract rules that define the reciprocal obligations of the members of a group. "Because of his defective socialization," Hunt points out, such a youngster ". . . views interpersonal relations in a very egocentric, self-centered fashion. . . . Experiencing inevitable failure in efforts to be independent, he frequently manifests general uncontrolled hostility."[5]

A child who has difficulty in working independently to achieve abstract goals needs the security of a structured environment. The ultimate goal, of course, is to help him learn to function more autonomously, but he can only move toward this goal gradually as he experiences success in learning how to apply his talents toward the accomplishments of clearly defined tasks. He cannot be expected to pattern his behavior in accordance with internal control mechanisms which he does not yet possess. The controls which help him find

[4] Benjamin S. Bloom, "Stability and Change in Human Characteristics: Implications for School Reorganization," *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Winter 1966, 46-47.

[5] David E. Hunt, "A Conceptual Systems Change Model and Its Application to Education" in O. J. Harvey (ed.), *Flexibility, Adaptability and Creativity* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1966).

meaning and form in what he does must be inherent in the environment. The logic of Bloom's argument as applied to the educationally disadvantaged student seems to me not merely evident but self-evident.

Merely stating the desirability of a consistent, structured environment does not, however, help us solve the difficult problems involved in specifying in more concrete terms the exact nature of the environment which teachers and administrators who work with educationally disadvantaged youth should seek to establish in their schools.

What Can the Teacher Do?

What does the teacher do to provide a structured environment in which the educationally disadvantaged child can move toward a more mature stage of development? She plans a variety of experiences and assignments which are readily broken down into smaller units whose meanings are relatively unambiguous. Rather than emphasizing discussion and self-directed inquiry methods appropriate for students whose intellectual and social development has not been impaired by disadvantaged economic background, she carefully guides individual and class activities. Insofar as possible, she makes sure that her students always know what they are supposed to be doing at any particular time. She establishes a regular daily schedule and makes strenuous efforts to avoid interruption in it, as her own experience leads her to agree with the student teacher in a low-income school who reported that

> . . . when the fire-drill bell suddenly sounded, the class just went wild. Anything which happens and is not part of their schedule causes absolute chaos. When they returned from the fire drill, it took thirty minutes to quiet them down. By then it was time for lunch.

In short, she provides her students with the outside support they need and even crave because they have not yet acquired the capital to function on their internal resources.

After concluding that the "optimal environment" for the educationally disadvantaged child is built on "clear, consistent, well-structured conditions in which the cultural expectations can be assimilated," David E. Hunt and his colleagues at Syracuse proceeded to channel such children into homogeneous classes in which teachers attempted to provide this kind of classroom environment. In words which will sound uncomfortably familiar to many teachers in low-

income schools, observers initially described these classes as "noisy, poorly disciplined, generally inattentive . . . extremely resistant to teacher . . . hard to keep interested in something for any length of time beyond ten minutes." At the end of the term, however, the teachers of these classes reported that their students did indeed respond most favorably when instructional activities and assignments were highly structured and unambiguous.

Even if convinced of the desirability of a consistent, structured environment in the inner-city classroom, an educator is still faced with the problem of selecting the curriculum which will actually be taught. Most educators who work with disadvantaged youth are now agreed that the curriculum in the low-income school should be heavily oriented toward the development of language skills, even if an unusually heavy emphasis on language arts—particularly reading—necessitates a corresponding de-emphasis on other activities. Emphasis on basic language skills can build into the curriculum just the kind of consistency which is likely to be most valuable, consistency in the form of a mutually reenforcing set of related experiences directly concerned with students' most serious deficiencies. Skill in reading, language and conceptualization, after all, is necessary for success in many other subjects, and it makes obvious sense to give extra time and attention to the development of language skills when working with youngsters whose educational disadvantage is in itself defined by inadequate mastery of these skills.

The importance of emphasizing reading and other basic language skills in programs for educationally disadvantaged students can be supported wtih several kinds of evidence. For one thing, there is good reason to believe that, due to poor discipline, unsuitable materials, and large classes, less time is devoted to reading and language instruction in inner-city elementary schools than in schools serving middle-class youth,[6] thus indicating that an actual reduction in the class time devoted to the development of these basic skills may itself be a significant factor responsible for the poor performance of the educationally disadvantaged child. The value of an unusual emphasis on fundamental language skills receives additional direct support from several studies, such as that recently conducted with inner-city first graders in New York City, which report that increasing the amount of time

[6] See Martin Deutsch, "Minority Group and Class Status as Related to Social and Personality Factors in Scholastic Achievement," a paper published by the Society for Applied Anthropology (Ithaca, New York: 1960).

spent in reading instruction leads to measurable improvements in the reading performance of educationally disadvantaged youth.[7]

Improvements in the basic learning skills of a youngster who has not been trained to function relatively autonomously in an unstructured environment are unlikely to be achieved unless his teachers plan detailed and carefully organized lessons specifically designed to achieve step-by-step development of his competence in each skill area. Moreover, teachers who carefully supervise the development of basic skills must give special attention to doing it in a manner to which the educationally disadvantaged youth is likely to respond. Since his attention span is short, teachers should schedule frequent shifts from one topic or activity to another, yet they must be equally careful to schedule repetitive study of previous lessons in order to provide practice in the use of underdeveloped cognitive skills and to give the student an additional sense of continuity in his experience in school. A schedule which is carefully planned so that materials on a variety of topics can be repeated according to some regular cycle will help the educationally disadvantaged child perceive meaningful patterns in his school work. It is no wonder that inner-city teachers who establish and maintain regular schedules appear to be more successful than those whose failure to systematically schedule a detailed and predictable set of learning experiences creates consternation among pupils who lack the internal control to provide their own structure and guidance.

No less important, the curriculum in inner-city classrooms should be organized around instructional materials which low-income students find interesting and challenging. The educationally disadvantaged student is not bedeviled by the carefully nurtured middle-class compulsion to take school work seriously even when it is least intrinsically interesting; consequently, he tends to openly reject tasks that involve learning for the sake of learning, even though he may be as committed to the abstract value and importance of education as is the middle-class student. Such youngsters are not at all reluctant to express to interviewers their resentment of teachers who assign ". . . things only the teacher is interested in" and their appreciation for teachers who are ". . . fair . . . [because they] give you some stuff you

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[7] Albert J. Harris and Blanche L. Serwer, "Teaching Reading to Disadvantaged Urban Negro First-Grade Children: First Year of the Craft Project," a paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, February 18, 1966.

like, they give you a variation of books, they ask you which one of them you like best, then give you work to prepare you for tests but they sort of mix in the work that you like with it."[8]

Conducting closely structured lessons which embody repetitive emphasis on basic skills while simultaneously devising a variety of experiences that capture the interest of educationally disadvantaged youth requires superior teaching ability, but there is no logical contradiction between these various objectives. Similarly, the responsibility to provide a consistently structured and carefully organized environment for educationally disadvantaged youth does not in itself prevent a teacher from being creative and flexible; just the opposite: it demands the utmost in creative and imaginative teaching. When standard commercially-available materials are ineffective because they are uninteresting and too difficult for students, the teacher is challenged to search out alternate materials or to devise her own. When pupils make little progress in learning abstract materials presented through verbal media, the teacher is challenged to rely heavily on audio-visual approaches through which subject matter acquires immediacy and clarity that help students perceive its form and meaning.

Through trial and error, and with numerous false starts, many teachers are learning to cope with these difficult but challenging imperatives. Teachers in the inner city, at all levels from the pre-kindergarten through the high school, are experimenting with "language-experience" methods in which instruction starts with raw material supplied by the student and expressed in his own language. Patterning instruction around ideas, language, and experiences drawn from students tends to ensure that they will be involved and interested, insofar as this can ever be guaranteed. Using this approach, the teacher helps the class rework the material being studied and gradually begins to introduce more abstract material. Hopefully, the student learns to handle more abstract language and content and to move freely between the language of his environment and the language of the conventional classroom.

Similarly, many inner-city teachers are learning to use art, drama, and related activities to communicate language skills in a manner that involves rather than bores educationally disadvantaged youth, and many are using audiovisual and duplicating equipment in ways that

[8] From tape-recorded interviews with junior high students prepared by Russell C. Doll for the 1966 Summer Workshop for Teachers of Disadvantaged Youth at the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

take into account the special learning problems of the students. In addition, a great deal of high-interest, low difficulty material specifically designed to build perceptual and cognitive skills is becoming available from commercial suppliers and school district curriculum units.

All these approaches promise to make valuable contributions in improving school programs for educationally disadvantaged youth, and all can be quite compatible with the overriding necessity to utilize creative teaching methods in a consistent, structured environment. The teacher who successfully uses the language experience approach, for example, must be unusually imaginative in moving students from an initial fixation on their own experience to a broadened understanding of ideas and materials with which they had little if any previous familiarity. Though the initial lessons are focused on material derived from student experience, the teacher has played an active and creative role in assigning the topic, in using questions and explanations to guide the lesson, and in carefully fitting the lesson into a sequence of specific lessons which structure the work of the class.

Negative Characteristics Unjustifiably Associated with a Consistent, Structured Classroom Environment

Because educators are prone, like most Americans, to think in terms of simplistic dichotomies, many will tend to place negative connotations on the concept of a consistent and structured classroom environment as the appropriate setting in which to work with educationally disadvantaged youth. Just as some will falsely equate teacher creativity with the relative absence of structure in classroom activities, others will unjustifiably conclude that a business-like approach which emphasizes basic learning skills either frees the teacher from her responsibility to make learning interesting to students or necessarily limits her ability to function as a stimulating guide. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have a good deal of evidence which indicates that effective teaching in general combines a business-like, well-organized approach with a stimulating variety of instructional methods;[9] the inner-city teacher is no less responsible for both aspects of effective teaching and no less challenged to work creatively along both dimensions of leadership than is her colleague in another type of school. The severe learning handicaps of her pupils, in fact, require that she be even more creative than teachers elsewhere in individualiz-

[9] David G. Ryans, *Characteristics of Teachers* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1961).

ing instruction and providing a wide range of materials for students at different levels of ability and achievement.

Similarly, some may incorrectly associate a consistent and structured classroom environment with punitive behavior on the part of the teacher or a hostile relationship between pupils and teacher. The teacher who carefully structures class activities need not and should not create a threatening atmosphere in her classroom. Here again, research indicates that effective teaching combines both dimensions: a well-organized classroom *and* friendly, supportive teacher behavior.[10]

Because the educationally disadvantaged child has poor self-control, a special effort should be made to formulate and implement rules and procedures to which pupils in any classroom must adhere by virtue of the fact that they are participating in an organized group. It is true that when educationally disadvantaged children are held to the ground rules of a structured environment, there will be frequent cases of resistance. These are equally or even more likely to occur, however, in the unstructured classroom, and many observers have noted that low-income students are most unruly when teachers abdicate their responsibility to provide close guidance which compensates for the students' inability to provide self-guidance. The inner-city teacher who combines a sympathetic classroom atmosphere with a structured environment for learning supplies two forms of psychological security to the educationally disadvantaged pupil. She thereby minimizes the likelihood that insecurity among her pupils will spark a self-perpetuating cycle of pupil defiance followed by increasing hostility between pupil and teacher. That is to say, a structured learning environment in which educationally disadvantaged students are guided toward improved performance simultaneously facilitates the building up of good teacher-pupil relationships.

Examples of Gains Made by Educationally Disadvantaged Pupils in Structured Learning Environments

The reciprocal interaction between success in learning, well-motivated students, and positive teacher-pupil relationships is a fundamental component in the philosophy of most educators. But educators have been slow to recognize that a structured environment is an additional key element in achieving a favorable balance for learning

[10] *Ibid.*

in inner-city schools. In part this realization has been hampered by the confusion which incorrectly equates creative, stimulating, and sympathetic teaching on the one hand with minimal planning, sequencing, and directing of learning activities on the other. In part it has been the result of our failure to give adequate consideration to the special problems and characteristics of the educationally disadvantaged child.

It must also be admitted, however, that by the time educationally disadvantaged students have reached the middle or upper grades, it may be difficult to discern the potential value of a consistent, structured environment. By the time they enter the fourth or fifth grade many disadvantaged students have already experienced overwhelming failure in inappropriate activities which they are unprepared to handle. Uninterested and sullen, unwilling or unable to participate autonomously in the learning process, retarded or seemingly retarded in fundamental conceptual skills, the educationally disadvantaged child may be slow to respond to the efforts of his teachers no matter how suitable or superior their techniques. Some will never respond positively at all. Nevertheless, if the argument of this paper is valid, the value of a consistent, structured environment should be most easily discernible in projects which reach educationally disadvantaged youth before the obscuring cycle of failure and alienation has been far advanced. And it *is* precisely in pre-school classrooms, in fact, that the clearest evidence of its value is beginning to accumulate.

Working with low-income four- and five-year olds, for example, Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann have reported significant improvement in I.Q. scores resulting from an instructional program in which the curriculum consists of "carefully planned small-step instructional units with continual feedback" and in which "the teacher controls the session relying only incidentally on spontaneous exchanges to dictate the direction of instruction." Given guidance through "direct instruction" in material which they have been prepared to master, disadvantaged pre-school students respond positively when they "are required to pay attention and to work hard . . . are rewarded for thinking; and half-hearted or careless performance is not tolerated."[11] Similarly, Sarah Smilansky recently reported experimental data demonstrating improvements in achievement when disadvantaged

[11] Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, "Observations on the Use of Direct Instruction with Young Disadvantaged Youth," *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. IV, Number 3 (Spring 1966), 55-62.

kindergarten students in Israel were given "active guidance in discovering . . . rules and principles" rather than the "generalized instructions" which are characteristic of "conventional instruction" at this level.[12]

Although a curriculum oriented to the teaching of basic skills in a structured, yet stimulating classroom environment will have its greatest impact at the pre-kindergarten level where the alleviation of the fundamental learning handicaps of educationally disadvantaged youth is relatively more feasible, the value of this approach in educating the disadvantaged has also been demonstrated by teachers working with older students in low-income areas. Three teachers of seventh-grade Common Learnings[13] at West Junior High School in Kansas City, Missouri, for example, joined together to form a teaching team in which they could work cooperatively to improve the performance of their extremely disadvantaged students.[14] All three members of the team considered reading improvement as their central objective; whenever it seemed profitable to do so, they eliminated work in other areas in order to give more time to reading instruction.

The scheduling of team responsibilities freed much of the time of one member for planning a comprehensive reading program which made it possible for students to work at one of five different levels of previous reading achievement. The reading program also included: bi-weekly visits to a library at which students were encouraged to read for pleasure and all were required to check out books; approximately eighty sessions using the Science Research Associates Laboratory Materials for the development of basic reading skills; individual student subscriptions to *Scope* magazine, a weekly publication designed to appeal to the special interests of urban teenagers; frequent oral reading activities in small groups; a variety of lessons emphasizing the positive value of reading achievement; weekly large-group sessions in which students formed teams to carry on a variety of learning "games" similar in format to the College Bowl television program;

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[12] Sarah Smilansky, "The Effect of Certain Learning Conditions on the Progress of Disadvantaged Children of Kindergarten Age," *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Spring 1966), 68-80.

[13] A core subject combining language arts and social studies. The three teachers were Marvin Elmore (team captain), Edith Stenson, and Lawrence Marsh.

[14] The school is located in the most depressed section of the city. The average score at a given grade level on tests of reading ability generally falls between the 5th and 15th percentiles.

experiments with imaginative mechanical and graphic devices (such as information wheels and profusely illustrated individual assignment forms) which the teachers built themselves to make instruction more meaningful for their students; frequent use of short lessons and assignments which the teachers prepared, duplicated, and distributed to their classes; and the utilization, whenever possible, of audiovisual materials such as transparencies, charts, diagrams (all prepared by the team members), films, film strips, and tape recordings.

Underlying all these approaches, according to the team captain, was a firm conviction that it was necessary to plan a comprehensive set of carefully structured and minutely detailed learning experiences which would constitute a guided program for the development of the basic "reading skills of these academically retarded children."[15]

Achievement tests administered at the end of the spring term in 1966 indicated that pupils in the team's classes had indeed made significant progress in improving basic reading skills. On tests which define reading achievement in terms of monthly growth, disadvantaged students generally score less than one month's gain per calendar month in school. In the experimental team teaching classrooms, however, the mean gain in reading between April, 1965, and April, 1966, achieved by sixty-seven students who satisfactorily completed the tests was 12.52 months. As one would expect, the normal regression effect was present in that the pupils who had scored in the bottom third on the pre-test registered a mean gain of 15.05 months while the pupils who scored in the top third showed a mean improvement of 9.5 months. The smaller gain by the pupils who were relatively better readers at the beginning of the experiment may also reflect the difficulty some few students might have encountered in making large gains merely because they already had a high proportion of correct responses. The statistic which most firmly supports the effectiveness of the special program, therefore, is that which shows a mean gain of 12.55 months made by pupils in the middle third of the distribution on the pre-test, a rate of improvement which is far more rapid than normally obtained in a population of extremely disadvantaged youth.

For the group as a whole, the mean reading score rose from a grade level of 5.4 in April, 1965 to a grade level of 6.6 in April, 1966. Rather than falling further behind grade level, as had been the pattern

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[15] *Temporary Progress Report #2: Team Teaching in Common Learnings at West Junior High School,* Mimeographed, Spring 1966.

in the past, this group of disadvantaged seventh-graders progressed in reading at a rate that was relatively more rapid than would be expected among an "average" group of American seventh-graders.

Educating Students Who Are Economically But Not Educationally Disadvantaged

Living in a slum does not automatically make a child educationally disadvantaged. Poverty makes it difficult but not impossible for the family and other institutions to provide the conditions in which the mental and social skills needed for success in school are adequately developed. Children are naturally resilient, and many rise above even the most unfavorable environments. It is for these reasons that every inner-city school is likely to have its share of students who are performing at or near grade level or who show considerable ability and persistence even when their performance is poor. Although they live in poverty, they are not educationally disadvantaged in the same sense as are students whose academic performance is unlikely to improve unless traditional school programs and approaches are rather thoroughly restructured and reorganized. They demonstrate a capacity for abstract reasoning which is far superior to the scores they earn on intelligence tests. They do not find it insuperably difficult to live up to the demands of the conventional academic classroom. In short, their potential has not been severely impaired by the exigencies of a depressed environment. They could perform adequately in standard-type programs, if they were required to meet a definite standard of performance in a setting in which they received a little extra help and encouragement from their teachers.

At present the youngster who is economically but not educationally disadvantaged is more or less a forgotten person. The dimensions of the educational problems in low-income schools have been so enormous and their potential consequences so pregnant with disaster in a stratified society that educators have grasped for across-the-board solutions to apply in educating a generic group broadly identified as "the deprived." The result has been that those students who are not severely disadvantaged educationally tend to be treated the same way as those whose handicaps make it all but impossible to utilize conventional measures of success and failure. Because many students have simply not been prepared to meet any meaningful standard at all, objective standards in the inner-city school are extremely low. It is no simple matter to isolate those students whose learning problems are less

deep-seated and hold them to standards which the majority of their classmates may be unable to meet. Instead, objective standards tend to disappear entirely, irrespective of the fact that a number of students could meet them if only they were pushed and pulled, persuaded and coerced into doing so. The low-income student who is not educationally disadvantaged soon discovers that he need not extend himself or stretch his talents to satisfy school requirements. Stated boldly, he is victimized by the fact that he attends a school in the slums.

Automatic Promotion and the Student Who is Not Educationally Disadvantaged

A comprehensive plan for improving the education of the low-income student who is not severely disadvantaged educationally would have many facets. Space limitations make it necesary in this pamphlet to focus on only the most central of the practices which operate to inhibit his performance in school—the common practice of awarding automatic promotions to students in low-income schools. The policy of awarding promotions to students no matter how inadequately they perform is widespread in American education. Arising from a number of causes (several of which are mentioned on the following pages), it can be a useful device to avoid compounding the sense of failure of students who for one reason or another cannot live up to unrealistic expectations. Its effects are extremely harmful, however, when it is applied to the economically but not educationally disadvantaged student.

On the one hand he is likely to seek immediate gratification of desires more insistently than do middle-class students whose early experiences train them to defer satisfaction far into the future. On the other hand, he has the ability and, in large measure, the motivation to succeed at an acceptable level in school. Torn between contradictory desires to seek immediate gratification and to work hard to achieve success in school, he does best when strong outside pressures swing the balance in favor of the demands of the school. When placed in a homogeneous class in which he can be automatically passed from grade to grade, or even when placed in a heterogeneous class with educationally disadvantaged peers who are promoted without having to achieve at any minimal level, he comes to view promotion as a right to which he is inherently entitled regardless of whether his performance is in line with his ability, and he acts accordingly. More often than not he finds it possible to obtain passing or even superior grades

without performing at a level very much superior to that of his educationally retarded classmates. As a result, he does not really understand how much hard work is involved in the quest for an education, or what it really means to operate near the limits of one's ability. He would benefit, more than anything else, from external demands that he meet a minimum standard. In the opinion of the author, elimination of the automatic promotions policy is an indispensable prerequisite in raising the level of performance of the low-income student who is not severely educationally disadvantaged.

Because many low-income students have already repeated one or more grades by the time they reach the freshman year in high school, it is easy to conclude that automatic promotions are uncommon in the inner-city. Such a conclusion is incorrect. Although retentions in inner-city schools are relatively frequent as compared with middle-class schools, most low-income youth are passed on to the next grade irrespective of the quality or quantity of their work in the classroom. The lack of standards for promotion in inner-city schools is seldom noted openly and almost never admitted, except, perhaps, when it is implicitly divulged in occasional accounts of inner-city students of high ability who graduate tenth, fifth, or even first in their high school class and then fail to survive their freshman year in college. Nevertheless, the pattern can be easily verified by visiting inner-city schools in any city. It is an unfortunate fact that the situation described as follows by two Chicago teachers reflects a general pattern which exists in all our large urban school districts:

A teacher of high school mathematics:

> Many Chicago kids actually drop out when they are in second grade—just sit in the classes from then on, being pushed ahead each year. If such a child manages to stay in school long enough to graduate from high school, his diploma can't be interpreted as much more than a certificate of attendance. It doesn't mean he's learned anything. We graduate people who are functional illiterates. They couldn't mix up a bowl of Jello following the direction of the package.[16]

A first-grade teacher:

> Consider the matter of passing children. Nowhere in the rule book does it say that you have to pass children if you do not believe they accomplished what they should. Yet the unwritten rule here is that you may flunk only 3 per cent in any school. One year our principal told us, 'You can't fail more than one person in your class, and preferably none. Especially in the sixth grade. We don't want them coming back.'[17]

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[16] *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 3, 1966, p. 25.
[17] *Ibid.*

Administrators are sometimes frank in limiting the number of failures for reasons of "economy," and indeed it does cost more to retain a pupil in a grade than to move him up and out of the school system as expeditiously as possible. In addition, it is seductively easy for school personnel to believe that a low rate of failures in somehow equivalent to a high rate of learning. But while it is technically true in a Skinnerian sense that degree of learning can be inferred from frequency of failure, there are too many variables in a classroom setting to justify an attempt to evaluate teachers in terms of the number of students who receive passing grades. Unfortunately it is not at all uncommon for administrators to give their subordinates reason for believing that the performance of teachers and principals will be evaluated by this single criterion. "If your failure rate is high," teachers report, "they tell you you are a bad teacher."[18] The constantly increasing size and complexity of urban school districts means that the temptation to make facile assessments on this basis will grow rather than diminish. The extent to which automatic promotions awarded to low-income youth are due to the reasons outlined above is indeterminate, but the reality of the pressure is unmistakably apparent to teachers in all but a handful of inner-city schools.

Automatic promotions are sometimes referred to as social promotions and justified with the argument that a student who is not promoted is not likely to do much better when required to repeat an experience in which he has already failed. In practice, however, the automatic promotions policy raises some important questions which cannot be settled by theoretical pronouncements torn from their context in psychology textbooks. Too often, for example, we fail to take into account how his peers are likely to react when they observe the promotion of a classmate who makes little or no effort to do well in school. Too seldom do we give adequate consideration to the possibility that automatic promotions awarded out of sympathy with the problems of underprivileged youngsters are actually a great disservice to many of them from a long-range point of view.

The potency (and also, unfortunately, the novelty) of a policy which absolutely refuses to accept anything less than hard work and high performance from low-income students who are not particularly disadvantaged educationally is illustrated in the following quotations from such youngsters who were members of homogeneously-grouped

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[18] *Ibid.*

classes of which high standards were demanded in the study of a "traditional" eleventh-grade curriculum in English:

Student A—That first day in class surprised me a little. Not because I had any great objection to working a little. But it was quite a change of pace. In my previous English classes, the work was nothing compared to this. A vocabulary test, spelling test, book report, themes and home-work not just one week of every marking period but every week of each marking period.

Student B—This semester has been best in English. I have never went through a semester with just "passing" grades before, but it is the only one that I have really learned something in. . . . Book reports were not required in my previous classes, you could do them for extra credit or to improve your reading.

Student C—I learned many things but of them the greatest was I learned how to think. One might say 'How did you make it this far without thinking?' Now it actually makes me tingle when I hear incorrect English spoken! This surprises me very much.

Student D—I also felt that I knew a little grammar. In this class, I found out different; and what luck. . . . The teacher was rough. But I benefited by her methods of educating others. . . . If there were more teachers who cared about their [students'] learning, they wouldn't have to worry in their last year of high school, whether they're prepared for college or not.

Student E—Book reports were my main weakness, but I made all "S's" [A's], mainly because there was no book reports necessary. Then suddenly on that first day of school in September I realized that I would have to overcome my neglecting to do book reports if I wanted to pass English 6. I did four. . . .

Student F—I honestly feel that I have been short-changed of an English background while taking my first semesters of English. . . . This semester I received "F's" the first and second marking periods, but I didn't give up because I knew this was what I deserved. I worked even harder the third marking period and received a C. This inceased my determination greatly.

Student G—In my opinion, my work here has far surpaseed any other work I've done in high school. I have finally been forced, by the high expectations of my instructor, to do the amount and quality of work that I am capable of doing.

During my previous years at this school, I have been

drifting along just doing the necessary work to get by. Now, suddenly, I am in a different kind of class and good work is expected of me. So I do it.

Student H—This semester has been a very full semester for me, because in all of the other English classes I have been in, I have never really learned anything. I only had to sit there learning nothing.

I have learned how to write a paragraph using the correct punctuation. But I don't think I could have learned all of this if I didn't have a demanding teacher. I wished I had run up on her long ago, I would not have been so dumb in English, because it is not a hard subject.

This summer I can truthfully say that I've learned more in this short six weeks than I have in the previous three years of English . . . I've never really worked before, not with any grave effort until I got into this class. Now I can hold my hand up a wee-bit higher because now I have confidence in myself and my thinking.

Automatic Promotions and the Educationally Disadvantaged Student: A Digression on the Future

Unless a youngster is exposed to meaningful learning experiences at a level he is emotionally and mentally prepared to handle, the question of whether or not he is promoted should not become a major issue; promoted or not, he will benefit very little from school curricula. It may well be, then, that educationally disadvantaged students who are placed in but cannot function adequately in conventional school environments should be promoted providing there is the least evidence of sincere effort. Nevertheless, the advisability of awarding automatic promotions to educationally disadvantaged students should hardly be considered an irrelevant or peripheral question; instead, it defines the core of the larger challenge we are likely to face in the near future.

Contrary to popular stereotypes encouraged in the mass media, educationally disadvantaged youngsters do recognize the long-range importance of education. They do want to succeed in school, but abstractly, without a realistic understanding of how much hard work is involved and without the self-imposed compulsion to undertake it. When curriculum is modified so that the educationally disadvantaged can experience success in school, standards of performance resume their central place as vital elements in the process of education. Performance in school is usually measured by grades, and grading, in turn, is one of the most important devices teachers use to motivate

satisfactory performance. This is true for low-income as well as middle-class youth. The use of grades as a motivating device has been severely criticized on many grounds for fifty years, and rightly so. The threat of a failing grade is an imperfect instrument in an imperfect world. It supplies a negative motivation which is less desirable than other, more positive forms of motivation. Nevertheless, the enduring emphasis on "passing" or "failing" in the overwhelming majority of schools testifies to our lack of success in discovering viable alternatives. The relative absence of self-discipline among students in inner-city schools means that grading is even more important in eliciting improved performance than is true in middle-class schools.

As additional resources and knowledge encourage modifications in curricular materials and instructional methods in accordance with the learning handicaps of educationally disadvantaged youth, the number of students with severe disabilities should be reduced and more low-income youngsters will be part of a "normal" classroom situation in which solid achievement is determined as much by effort and motivation as by environmentally-linked obstacles to learning. As this happens, automatic promotions will become more and more a wasteful disservice to inner-city youth whose performance would be immeasurably improved if they were held to standards which compensatory programs had helped prepare them to achieve; growth in basic skills, after all, will not immediately and automatically give them the self-control which is developed only through a self-generating cycle based on the reciprocal interaction between effort, success, reward and broadening perspectives.

We are approaching a time when foreclosure of the bankrupt policy of awarding automatic promotions to educationally disadvantaged youth will be both realistic and urgently necessary. The resolution with which educators follow through in establishing realistic standards for promotion will be a major factor in determining whether the expenditure of billions of dollars will do very much to improve the educational performance of low-income youth.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Because individuals pattern their behavior in accordance with their expectations for the future, it often happens that expectations set in motion a series of events which is primarily responsible for generating the very outcome that was originally expected. Social scientists refer

to such a series of events as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The anticipation of imminent inflation, for example, may cause people to spend their money before inflation can reduce its purchasing power, thus creating the very rise in prices which they expected in the first place. The candidate for public office tries to convince voters that because his election is a certainty, they would waste their votes by voting for his opponent; if this strategy is successful, it can be a significant factor in helping him achieve a runaway victory. "Parents," notes sociologist John Seeley, "who believe ill enough of their children long enough may finally come to have children it were well to think ill of." So, too, in education: the teacher who expects little from her students helps to produce students of whom little can be expected.

There are a number of reasons why the teacher's expectations play an important part in determining how well pupils will achieve. For one thing, the teacher who questions the capacity of her pupils will not be motivated to try as hard as she would if she believed her students could do improved work under her tutelage, and she will tend to tolerate work that is inferior to what she might demand if she believed her students could meet more rigorous standards. It is also true, moreover, that students seldom do well in any activity which they do not see themselves as capable of carrying out successfully. Not only are they reluctant to risk failure in a task they think it is beyond their capacities to achieve, but even when they take up such a challenge, a sense of inadequacy interferes with their efforts to concentrate all available energies on problems which must be faced and overcome, if the task is to be successfully prosecuted. "Confidence," athletes constantly remind us, "is half the game."

Educators have become acutely aware that a child's confidence in himself can be as significant a determinant of his performance as are his inborn abilities or his level of readiness. The child who for one reason or another does not think of himself as a competent reader will try to avoid reading because he does not expect to gain anything worthwhile from the experience. When asked to read he tends to mobilize his defenses to avoid embarrassing failures, perhaps by withdrawing in a shell, by pretending that the task doesn't interest him anyway, or by creating disturbances which deflect attention from the painful task at hand. Understandably, he would rather spend his time and energy improving his skills in an activity in which he thinks his talents will allow him to become more competent and successful.

A youngster's view of himself is largely derived from the way he is

seen by others. The average student whose teachers think he is slow may well come to think of himself as being slow; after all, is not the teacher an adult who is expert in making such a judgment? Once this happens, his response will be less efficient than it might be if he approached schoolwork with confidence and the determination derived from confidence, thus "verifying" his teacher's low expectations and refueling an accelerating cycle of failure, frustration, self-doubt, and unsatisfactory performance. At first he may respond as did the student in the lowest reading group—the "turtles"—of a teacher whose "constant spoken and implied feeling about him and his classmates had been, 'Well, I guess I can't expect anything from you' "; when asked a very easy question, he "mumbled, 'I don't have to [answer]. I'm a turtle.' "[19] In the end, after falling farther and farther behind the level he might have achieved had he developed the confidence and received the support which would have encouraged him to test his skills and refine his talents, for all practical purposes he will indeed have become a "turtle." The circle of the self-fulfilling prophecy is now complete.

Precisely because so many of their students have not been adequately prepared for school to begin with, teachers in low-income schools experience unusual amounts of frustration and resistance which lead them to magnify still more the real handicaps that make their students difficult to teach. By degrees, many begin to accept the conclusion that low-income students are unable to learn, a belief which serves not only to excuse poor performance in the present, but which also decreases the likelihood that performance will improve significantly in the future. The dynamics of this cycle were recently spelled out by ex-Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, who described the genesis and effects of the "myth" that:

> . . . the children of poverty and racial minorities were not merely difficult to teach, but were virtually unteachable. It was true that they came from families of low educational attainment and that their homes lacked books and other incentives of learning. But this dreary recital was also used as an excuse for poor schools, poor teachers, and ineffective education. Such a mythology becomes self-fulfilling in schools of poverty. Standing apart from the community they serve, these slum schools slammed their doors shut at three-thirty when school closed for the day; thus the school was presumably 'protected' from the neighborhood. In such schools, where the child was considered ungifted, the

[19] Gertrude Noar, *The Teacher and Integration* (Washington, D. C.: The National Education Association, 1966), p. 47.

most dangerous gap in our society was permitted to grow and enlarge.[20]

Although the low-income pupil who is also educationally disadvantaged is more likely to be seen as "unable" to learn and, consequently, not worth teaching, the low-income student who is not severely retarded educationally may be the more blatant victim, in that exaggerated pessimism among his teachers will be less justifiably grounded in objective conditions and may help produce an unusually large discrepancy between his abilities and his performance. In either case, intensive efforts are needed to help inner-city teachers overcome the debilitating feeling that they and their students are trapped in a hopeless situation.

Having noted this, it is equally important to recognize that low-income students do have special handicaps which make it difficult, and occasionally even impossible, for them to succeed in school. It is true that some educators have created a "cult" of the disadvantaged in order to write off their own responsibility for instituting some very difficult changes in programs and policies. But it is no improvement to replace one cult with an equally one-sided countercult which attributes the whole blame for the poor achievement of so many low-income youth on misguided or, worse, racially prejudiced teachers who do not expect anything but poor achievement from these youths.

Much pain and heartache can be expected to occur in inner-city schools in which teachers are convinced they can achieve more than the custodial goals which so often seem predominant in difficult situations. It is hard for a teacher to maintain positive expectations for her students if most of her previous efforts appear to have been futile and unproductive. The teacher who attempts to hold students to minimal or gradually rising standards which they have not been required to take seriously in the past can expect to encounter a good deal of resistance.

Difficulties notwithstanding, the significant part that teacher expectations play in shaping and eliciting student response means that the teacher must continue to maintain the highest legitimate expectations if she is to have a significant impact in leading her pupils toward better levels of achievement. It follows that perseverance on the part of the teacher is an indispensable key to better education in the

[20] Francis Keppel, *The Necessary Revolution in American Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 39.

inner-city school, particularly with regard to those students who, because they are severely disadvantaged educationally, have the furthest to go and make the slowest progress.

Undoubtedly, there will be very little, if any, improvement in the performance of some youngsters no matter how much the teacher perseveres. In the right setting and with proper encouragement, however, many students in inner-city schools really will begin to progress, in both motivation and actual performance, though it may take a long time for improvement to be noticeable. As the disadvantaged pupil can succeed only through enormously difficult personal effort, so his teacher can succeed only by consciously fighting the many compelling pressures which say "Give up . . . What's the use? . . . It's not worth the bother." Teachers who find it within themselves to invest even more energy in the face of discouraging obstacles discover that their efforts do begin to make a difference.

The success stories in difficult schools are not always highly visible, and sometimes they describe only minor victories, but they are numerous enough to show that the teacher who somehow maintains her resolution in an inner-city school can get results. Charles Mitchell, for example, describes the experience of a twelve-year old named Marvin who was

> convinced that he'd never graduate. But he was accepted, interviewed, tested and fitted into place in the non-graded program. His teachers worked with him, expected things of him . . . it wasn't easy. He guessed and he missed, he lied, shouted, was silent, threw things and dropped things and scribbled in his notebook—testing everybody, everything, with all the old tricks that angry, alienated children use, and some new ones he thought up by himself. But the teachers treated him honestly, fairly. He couldn't put them down or fluster them. And they didn't put him down, either. People listened to him, and asked him questions, and answered his questions. He couldn't stand it. He began to work, to read. He read his way out of the newspaper and the catalog units and into the schoolbooks, from 2.6 to 5.6 in one year.[21]

Another instructive example was given to an interviewer by an inner-city teacher who described how her conscientiousness in writing notes to parents about uncompleted homework seemed to represent nothing but wasted effort, until she had written such notes for many

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[21] Charles Mitchell, *The Culturally Deprived: Educating the Disadvantaged* (Chicago: The Research Council of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement, 1964).

months and failure to complete assignments began to decline markedly. Still another teacher told the same interviewer that she began the semester with simple objective-type test questions and gradually introduced more difficult tests and assignments; by the end of the year her students had progressed so far that their response on relatively difficult essay tests was highly satisfactory. These illustrations underline the conclusion that teachers seldom achieve success in inner-city schools without encountering many reverses which they must somehow find the will to rise above. The degree to which they persevere is largely dependent on a firm belief that their students are capable of learning, and their positive expectations concerning their pupils is reinforced, in turn, by the success which follows from their initial perseverance. These reciprocal interrelationships, which taken together replace a "negative" self-fulfilling prophecy with a "positive" one, are illustrated in the account of an elementary-school student teacher who reported that:

> When I first took over all six students in the low reading group were real dead weights and it took tremendous effort to generate even a spark of enthusiasm. I stuck to my guns and was thrilled when they began making an effort to read faster, more carefully and with deeper understanding. We had some very enjoyable and profitable discussions and I thought I was making some real progress. Then I gave the standard reading tests, as we had finished the middle readers and I thought the group was ready to move on to the next series. That night as I graded the tests I became increasingly discouraged and by midnight I was ready to quit altogether. Not one child had scored above the twentieth percentile, which is considered a 'low' score by the testing company, and half the group scored below 'low.'
>
> How could I have been so far off the track? Where did I fail in preparing them? All was not lost, however, as we have since then drilled on those skills on which the tests showed the group needed the most work, and I am happy to say that before I left I had introduced them to the most advanced books in the reading series. I am glad now that I didn't decide to give up—which had been my first and only reaction the evening I had graded their first tests.[22]

Administrative Leadership in Educating Disadvantaged Youth

Because education in a middle-class community possesses a momentum all its own, middle-income students normally achieve at accept-

[22] Merlynne Flanagan, "Record of Experience as a Student Teacher in an Inner City School," a paper prepared for the student teaching course at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, Spring, 1966.

able levels even when they attend poorly administered schools. An adequate level of education in a low-income school, by contrast, is not likely to be attained unless its administration is vigorous and highly skilled in working to overcome the forces responsible for the abominable situations which presently exist in the large majority of inner-city schools. It is no exaggeration, indeed, to state that the adequacy with which our schools will be able to prepare millions of disadvantaged youngsters for full participation in a complex, industrial society depends on the competence of the school administrators who will be responsible for establishing more effective and appropriate programs and policies such as those described on the preceding pages. A brief re-examination of several of these points in terms of their implications for administration will underscore the conclusion that none of them could be implemented effectively in the absence of an administrator capable of exercising an unusually high order of professional leadership.

There is much solid evidence to support the conclusion that the appropriate learning environment for educationally disadvantaged youth is one which is structured and consistent, but a principal cannot sit back and expect the hard-pressed members of the faculty of an inner-city school to somehow reach this conclusion automatically, particularly in view of the fact that their training as well as their personal inclinations may dispose many of them to believe that teachers should provide as little structure as possible. A consistent, structured learning environment which yields cumulative, reinforcing gains in the inner-city school, furthermore, presumes that all or most of the members of a faculty have reached a common understanding of the need for such an approach, and that they are working cooperatively to implement it. This is unlikely to happen unless the principal communicates to his faculty an understanding of the rationale behind the approach and, more important, of what it means in terms of their use of materials and instructional methods in the classroom. Through no fault of their own, teachers have not received the kind of training which would have prepared them for such a task, and much of the training they have received actually makes them less rather than more able to function successfully in inner-city schools. The inner-city principal, in effect, is called on to provide training and retraining which the schools of education are still reluctant or unable to undertake, and to do so on his own limited resources.

Raising standards in the inner-city school is a difficult task which

cannot be accomplished without the expenditure of enormous amounts of energy. Every step toward its accomplishment is dependent on outstanding administrative leadership. The ways in which students are grouped and the organization of learning experiences in every classroom must put special emphasis on helping students perceive a relationship between what they attempt and what they achieve. Because many poorly self-disciplined low-income students will not benefit significantly from an emphasis on meaningful standards in one classroom if they move to another classroom in which no real demands are made on them, a commitment to raising standards cannot succeed unless it is unequivocally announced and implemented on a school-wide basis. The practical implementation of this commitment, therefore, depends on the principal's skill in coordinating the activities of the members of his faculty. The necessary coordination, furthermore, cannot be achieved merely by sending directives to teachers who justifiably assert a professional right to utilize their own informed judgment in determining what they should do in the classrooms for which they are responsible.

It takes time to communicate to pupils the realization that they must adhere to minimum requirements which for a variety of reasons had received only lip-service in the past. Teachers must understand that improvement in pupil performance may be slow to appear. Disciplinary problems may increase among pupils for whom less rigorous expectations embody an attractive path of least resistance, and the staff will thereby be tempted to revert to the custodial goals of the past unless the principal provides continuous encouragement and support. If revision in the automatic promotions policy results in an increase in money-consuming retentions, it is the principal who may be subjected to pressure from parents or from his own superiors and may even have reason to believe that his own career is thereby placed in jeopardy.

The principal not only must take responsibility for a school-wide effort to achieve gradually rising standards, but he must also be alert to the possibility that requirements can become overly rigid. It will not be easy to prevent a policy which introduces objective standards of performance from becoming a disastrous, simple-minded "sink or swim" policy. When insistence on standards threatens to degenerate into a simplistic attempt to push economically disadvantaged youth beyond what can reasonably be expected of them, it is the administrator who must make it clear that neither absence of standards

nor their overly-ambitious application can be productive, and that the balance between the two extremes must be continually weighed.

What we ultimately face, then, is a challenge to the competence, integrity and wisdom of the administrator. To revise thoroughly the educational policies in low-income schools will imply past negligence in not having made these changes sooner. Administrators who react defensively to criticisms of their persons or their schools are not likely to rise to the occasion. The easier and safer alternative is to search out and reiterate reasons, many of them valid, which explain why the situation is not better than it is. Only the administrator who is secure enough to give more attention to exploring possibilities for the future than to justifying the failures of the past can hope to meet the challenge.

A Concluding Example

To visit inner-city schools is still, on the whole, a disheartening experience. From time to time, however, a visitor will be directed, if he is lucky, to a school in which educationally disadvantaged youth are disproving the myth that they are incapable of appreciable improvement in their school-work. Sometimes located in the very heart of the slums, these schools are outwardly very little different from surrounding schools which are attended by students with almost perfectly equivalent backgrounds. What does differentiate them is the sound program of education which they manage to conduct even in the most unfavorable circumstances. They differ from each other in that each is likely to have developed its own unique mixture of unusual projects, ingenious methods, and special emphasis, but in nearly every case the basic source of their success lies in intensive, carefully-planned attempts to teach fundamental learning skills. Invariably they are administered by unusually competent principals who provide multiple forms of support in helping their teachers establish a consistent, structured learning environment in which the special learning handicaps of disadvantaged youth can be most effectively overcome.

One such school is the Schiller Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. Schiller draws most of its students from the multi-story public housing projects which surround it, and there is no question but that a large proportion of them are both economically and educationally

disadvantaged. Each teacher at the Schiller School receives *Sequential Checklists of Basic Skills and Facts* for use in teaching arithmetic, science, and English at her respective grade level. The checklists provide outlines of classroom lessons and exercises which teachers in the school have found useful in working to achieve a limited—and therefore manageable—group of fundamental learning objectives, and each teacher is expected to build her lessons around the objectives and curricular content enumerated on the lists.

Equally important, the instructional activities in each subject and at each grade level are selected for their concreteness, as it is felt that most of the students are not yet capable of experiencing success in the typically abstract learning experiences of the middle-class school. This emphasis on concreteness should not, however, be interpreted as a philosophical rejection of the goal of teaching sophisticated academic materials and advanced skills to disadvantaged youth, since its major purpose is precisely to insist on the use of material which they *can* learn in order that they may develop skills which later will help them master less tangible academic material.

In addition to the structure engendered through the planning of learning experiences in accordance with compilations of specific classroom activities and objectives, the *Sequential Checklists* as used in the Schiller School also tend to produce unified learning environments not only within individual classrooms but throughout the school as a whole. The selective ordering of the objectives across grade levels provides consistency in the instruction students receive as they move through the school. Much attention is given to ensuring that the activities at different grade levels fit with what has come before and what will come after. New teachers are given ten weeks of special instruction in how to make use of the lists. Since the checklists are prepared by the members of the faculty working in close cooperation with the administration, each teacher has an unusually comprehensive conception of the materials to which her students have been previously exposed as well as the materials and skills which succeeding teachers will expect them to have mastered. The continuity thus achieved within the structured curricular experiences and objectives is vital in bringing about progressive development in the fundamental learning skills of the school's pupils. In the words of Principal John

Cunnea, the major rationale behind the system is to use "basic materials in a methodical fashion" in order that students may experience "success in a structured program" which minimizes frustrating encounters with objects or activities that are too abstract for the educationally disadvantaged child to understand.

The emphasis on consistent learning experiences in a structured environment constitutes a major part of a more comprehensive effort to improve the scholastic performance of the economically disadvantaged students at the Schiller School. Much attention is given to enlisting the cooperation and understanding of parents, and the staff has learned to plan, publicize, and conduct graduations, open houses, and other events in a manner which attracts more parents than can be accommodated in the school's meeting facilities. In regular curricular activities as well as in a wide variety of extra-curricular events, the staff systematically attempts to compensate for the low-income child's comparative deficiency in intrinsic motivation by finding ways to provide tangible awards and by seizing every opportunity to supply intangible encouragement. Although much more could be done to modify the academic content of the curriculum at Schiller in accordance with the interests and previous experience which low-income youth bring to the classroom, progress has been made in this direction through the elimination of overly abstract materials and objectives.

Administrators at Schiller Elementary are enthusiastic about this intensive drive to improve the performance of the school's pupils, and the scores obtained by students on standardized examinations support their belief that the program has been effective. Students at Schiller, like disadvantaged students everywhere, do poorly on tests of general ability. But whereas pupils in adjoining schools generally achieve at a relative level equivalent to their performance on intelligence tests, Schiller's students obtain scores on most achievement measures which are better than would be predicted on the basis of their performance on ability measures. The administration of an I.Q. test in the spring of 1965, for example, indicated that the average level of ability among both third and sixth graders was at the third stanine,[23]

[23] Stanine ranks indicate relative placement on a scale running from a low of one to a high of nine.

but stanine placements on the subtests of the Metropolitan Achievement Test Battery were as follows:

Third Grade (237 Pupils)		Sixth Grade (172 Pupils)	
1. Word Knowledge	3	1. Word Knowledge	3
2. Word Discrimination	4	2. Reading	3
3. Reading	4	3. Spelling	4
4. Spelling	4	4. Language	4
5. Language	4	5. Language Study Skills	4
6. Arithmetic Computation	4	6. Arithmetic Computation	5
7. Arithmetic Problem Solving and Concepts	3	7. Arithmetic Problem Solving	4
		8. Social Studies Information	3
		9. Social Studies Study Skills	4
		10. Science	3

By the time disadvantaged students enroll in school, their learning handicaps have become too deep-seated to allow quick or complete remediation. The gains made at Schiller, accordingly, have been neither astonishingly rapid nor startlingly large. Nevertheless, although Schiller's pupils still score below the national average on standard achievements tests, their slow but steady progress has enabled them to break away from the typical pattern wherein low-income students fall further and further behind grade level each year in school. Such examples indicate that, given outstanding leadership and conscientious, perceptive efforts to improve curriculum and instruction, much can be done to counteract the many forces which conspire to depress the performance of low-income youth and to all but destroy their opportunity to compete successfully as full participants in American society. Our schools need not fail them.

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